

BANDED CANADA GOOSE RESIGHTINGS IN WASCANA PARK, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN



Canada Goose M414 in Wascana Park, Regina, Saskatchewan – June 9, 2021. Photo credit: Ryan Fisher.

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Introduction

Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are a well-known, long-lived species, with some records of wild geese living over 30 years.¹ Annual survival rates of adult Canada geese range from 46 per cent in the Atlantic Flyway to 72 per cent

over a four-year period in Regina, Saskatchewan.^{2,3} Furthermore, urban geese typically have higher survival rates as compared to rural geese and tend to return to the same areas year after year.⁴

There has been a long history of banding Canada geese in Regina.⁵ Between 2009 and 2015, Wascana Centre Authority (now Provincial Capital Commission) banded Canada geese that were captured in Wascana Park with a standard metal band.³ From 2010-2015, they also added

red plastic leg bands with white coding to some geese, thereby making reading the band without catching the bird much easier.³ Some of these birds were translocated to Cumberland Lake (approximately 425 km northeast of Regina) and subsequently released, and some were released directly back into Wascana Park.³ Each year during this study period, banded geese were resighted or recaptured.³

In the last several years, many people who frequent Wascana Park have noticed colour-banded geese, but to our knowledge, there has not been a concerted effort to resight banded birds to determine which geese were still using Wascana Park since the initial study period. In 2020, we enlisted nine volunteers to record resightings of banded Canada geese in Wascana Park. Volunteers were asked to record any visible colour banded individuals and, when possible, to read and record aluminium leg band numbers. We searched for banded Canada geese from 20 April to 16 May within the boundaries of Regina, but mostly concentrating in or near Wascana Park.

Results and Discussion

We encountered 59 unique, banded individual geese over the four-week period. Thirty-seven of these individuals were females and 22 were males. Adult Canada geese cannot be reliably aged during banding like some other bird species, therefore the age of a bird is described as a minimum based on the year banded, while acknowledging the bird could be much older. Of the colour banded geese we observed in 2020, ages ranged from at least six years old to 12 years or older (Table 1), with

TABLE 1. Hatch years of banded Canada geese that were resighted in Wascana Park in 2020. Adult Canada geese cannot be reliably aged during banding like some other bird species, therefore the age of a bird is described as a minimum based on the year banded.

HATCH YEAR	AGE IN 2020	♀	♂	TOTAL
2008 or earlier	12+	3	2	5
2009 or earlier	11+	6	2	8
2010 or earlier	10+	3	0	3
2011 or earlier	9+	4	2	6
2012 or earlier	8+	7	1	8
2013 or earlier	7+	6	4	10
2014 or earlier	6+	8	11	19

the average age being at least seven years old. The average age is skewed, as banding has not occurred since 2015, so birds must be six years or older if they carry a red colour band. Eleven of the geese had been translocated to Cumberland Lake in 2009, 2010, 2011, or 2012 and then had been reencountered in Wascana Park in 2020. Flockhart & Clarke (2017) found that 83 per cent of adult Canada geese translocated out of the park returned in subsequent years, so it is not surprising to see these birds in 2020. We did not encounter any geese that were banded outside Regina. Almost all of our resightings were of alphanumeric bands (57) and two were of birds that had single aluminium bands. All band resightings were reported to the Bird Banding Office at the conclusion of the study (www.reportband.gov).

Observing 59 banded individuals was relatively high given that five years has elapsed since the Canada Goose banding program was discontinued. The original study typically resighted, on average, 108 banded individuals per year while the project was ongoing.³ We likely missed some banded individuals and it would be beneficial to continue resighting efforts throughout the year. As a result of an inability to read numbers on most aluminium bands, either due to distance

or numbers on the bands being obscured by dirt/mud or wear, resightings of identifiable birds with single aluminium leg bands was low.

Our small study highlights the continued use of Wascana Park by several geese that were banded as part of the Canada Goose banding program from 2009-2015.³ Given that some geese are still using Wascana Park for breeding even after a decade, it indicates that this urban park provides suitable nesting habitat for these birds over the long term.

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POETRY

Windy Day

The prairie grasses wave
sinuously, beckoningly,
at the strong urging
of the wind blowing,
gusting due west.

Don't even have to
close my eyes to
envision, as said
by Harry Hourie,
the entire panoply
of prairie life in
his story of the
Last Great Herd.

A meadowlark bursts forth
from cover and ascends,
despite the wind's strength
in a definitive vertical flight
until banking sharply off
on some errand, mission.

A shy jumper sights me
with the dogs. Flees.
Clears the north fence
in stride, until she's gone,
seemingly vanished where
the green earth is met
by the blue of Heaven.

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